WASHINGTON'S TALENTED BLIND----WHO THEY ARE

Remarkable Number Who Have Won Success Despite Infirmity.

Talents Find Employment in Many Varied and Useful Fields.

WHEN the ordinary man or woman feels in a mood particularly melting, it is to the blind that most of the sympathy goes out. And yet it is a fact, for what it is worth, that the faces of the blind, of those of all persons, wear the serenest expression of content. In Washington one finds constant occasion to marvel at this phenomenon; here live some of the most gifted and intelligent of the blind in this country.

Their club and constant meeting place is the pavilion and reading room for the blind at the Congressional Library, where each day the larger portion of them are gathered and where the common interests that bind them together are discussed. It is a place beautiful, made not less so by the sweet spirit of its presiding genius, and though the blind are not permitted to see all the beauties that surround them they cannot remain unconscious of their influence. Indeed, they are not; one has only to look upon their faces, smiling and happy, suffused with gentle rapture, to understand that they appreciate to the full the value of the esthetic influences that surround them at the pavilion.

When the daily reading or musical is given at the pavilion most of them are present. To some it comes only as the enjoyment of a long-continued privilege, but to some of the others, whose mental vision has been more recently clarified, it is the very outpouring of heavenly light. To all of them comes Miss Etta Jossellyn Giffin, superintendent of the pavilion, sympathetic, understanding, helpful, bright and cheery as an April morn, so that to her the affections of her charges go out in generous response.

A Center of Comfort.

The pavilion, familiar to many Washingtonians, is furnished with desks and chairs of old mahogany, one of the former being that at which books were charged, since the time of Lincoln, in the old library at the Capitol. The walls are softly tinted, the windows give a glimpse of green and shady trees, and the vista of Washington streets and the constant inspiration of the National's Capital. All around are the books, printed in raised characters, that the blind read. A piano, cards, and games, typewriters of strange, and unfamiliar construction, music, written in characters only the blind or their intimates can read, complete the furniture of the room.

Col. Edward F. Jones, formerly of of Binghamton, and the man "who paid the freight," and formerly, also, lieutenant governor of the State of New York, is one of the pavilion's constant visitors. Colonel Jones lost his sight a number of years ago and since that time it has required all of his blithe good nature to keep him out of the shlough of despond. He has laughed and joked through it all, but it was not hard to understand that under the veil of jollity he assumed was concealed a tragic mask. It could not have been otherwise to a man of his wide activities, training, and travel.

An Elderly Enthusiast.

Now he has a new interest, which he pursues day by day with unflagging zeal. It is the study of "point," the system of characters in which books for the blind are printed. He pursues it constantly under the direction of Miss Giffen, with all the enthusiasm that besets the boy who has been given his first box of brushes and paint. The colonel is more than seventy years young, and the study of this new art is sometimes a bit difficult. It means, practically the cultivation of touch to an extent so unusual with the sighted as to amount almost to the gain of a new sense.

The colonel keeps at it with dogged and good-natured persistence. Miss Giffen had made for him a number of metal plates, on which were the raised characters of the alphabet. After a day or two he came back, proffering the plates and showing another.

"The characters on these were too thin and small for my old and clumsy fingers, so I have made another," said the colonel. "What do you think of it?"

With chuckling glee he exhibited his substitute, some feet across in extent, and with the characters indicated by carpet tacks. Colonel Jones does not bank very heavily upon the esthetic value of his invention, but its use he declares to be very pronounced.

"When one is seventy," he declares—the colonel owns up to being that age in moments of extreme confidence; "one needs something large and substantial. There it is."

The Blind Chaplain.

When one visits the House of Representatives at the hour of convening and hears the fall of the gavel, the most striking and conspicuous figure, at least for the moment, is not that of the Speaker, but of the blind chaplain of the House, the Rev. Dr. H. N. Couden. His brief, simple, impressive invocation falls on the ear in words of singular melody.

A moment before the House has been in a turmoil, the aisles filled with members and messengers and hurrying pages; now all is still and reverent, and every member stands, with bowed head. The unseeing eyes of the chaplain look out upon a scene of perfect reverence.

Dr. Couden is a striking example of what is possible for a blind person to achieve. He lost his sight while serving with gallantry as a volunteer in the Union army, during the civil war, and for an unhappy moment thought he saw blasted all the bright hopes life had held out to him. Not, though, for long.

It is said that while he was being borne from the field, his sightless eyes covered by a bandage, one of his comrades said: "Poor fellow, he had better be dead." His reply was the outcome of the cheery spirit that has always been his: "Don't be too sure of that, boys. You may hear from me again." So those "boys" have, and they never speak his name save to remember that ghastly field and the humor that could find a ray of hope, even behind its clouds of smoke and the lightning of war and strife.

Miss Campbell's Rare Gifts.

Then there is Miss Helen Marr Campbell, poet and musician, a number of whose composition have been thought to be of such merit as to be played by the Marine Band in public concerts, and by other organizations of the front rank. Miss Campbell is herself so intensely interested in music that she never misses a concert in Washington, and nearly always, on such occasions, is surrounded by a little group of her sightless friends. So invariable is this custom, indeed, that bandmasters and conductors have come to look for her and would be disappointed if she failed to appear, and more than disappointed if the blind faces of herself and her friends failed to light up with the glow of appreciation.

Miss Campbell's literary work has been as extensive as her musical productions. Contributions of every character to newspapers and magazines have occupied a large part of her time, and many poems of sentiment and humor have come from her pen. She is a constant worker for the improvement of the condition of her sightless friends, and it was largely due to her influence with the late John Russell Young, then Librarian of Congress, that the pavilion and reading room for the blind was established. There are few persons whose activities are wider than are hers, few whose interest in the great world of art and affairs is more acute.

Albert B. Cady, who comes to Washington from Illinois, lost his sight completely when he was fifty years old, though it had been leaving him gradually for a considerable period before that time. From a single evening's work, he says, he emerged from the depths of depression into a new world of happiness and hope. It was the evening he learned the point system of printing.

After his loss of sight Mr. Cady went to the Illinois Institution for the Blind. The superintendent thought he had passed the age when he could master the intricacies of the point system and started him in on the Moon system, a clumsy and ineffective substitute, which Mr. Cady found slow and unattractive. He wanted something better and that evening he started in to find it. He attacked the mysteries of point.

"In four hours," he said yesterday, "I had mastered the alphabet. A great sigh of relief and thankfulness went up from me, for I knew the hour of reprieve had come. It required weary hours, through weary months, for me to acquire proficiency in reading, but at last I gained this also.

"I cannot tell you what the change has meant. Before I was moody and despondent; now I think I am as happy as any man. The ability to read and its resulting opportunities mean to one without sight what a free pardon would to a man confined in a prison cell. If I had money and ability I should inaugurate a propaganda, which would have for its purpose an appeal to the blind of all ages, in all countries, to learn to read in point. One is never too old to learn, as I have found by personal experience."

A story which illustrates how true this is, in the case of a person lacking Mr. Cady's advantages of refinement and education, is told by Miss Giffen. She calls it "The Evolution of Joseph Tippetts," and that describes it.

"When he came from the institution for the blind at which he had been trained it was with a set of piano tuning instruments in his pocket. They had taught him to tune pianos, but they had neglected to instill into him any habits of cleanliness or instincts of refinement. He was rough, crude, almost uncivilized, with a snarling manner and an uncivil tongue. You may imagine he did not get many pianos to tune, and that his business engagements were not pressing.

"He was accustomed to come to the reading room of the library very frequently, principally, I am inclined to believe, because there was heat and a comfortable chair and a place to sleep. His manners were not exactly attractive and his usual response to a question was a snarl.

The Dawn of New Life.

"I worked with him, insisted he should read and each day that he came put a book into his hands. If by some chance it interested him he would, if by the more likely chance it did not, he would sit for hours with the book in his lap and his hands wandering idly across its pages. I introduced him to all who came and endeavored to breed in him a spirit of gentleness and candor. He improved a little, I noticed, but not much. As is my custom I introduced him, with all the others, to the men and women who favor us with lectures and readings. On one of these occasions he was presented to F. Hopkinson Smith.

"To my inextinguishable surprise, he thanked Mr. Smith, in terms courteous and polite, for the pleasure the reading had given his fellows and himself. From that hour his regeneration began. Some word the speaker had let fall had lighted upon fertile soil in his dark and secretive mind and borne fruit. He was a changed boy. Some ladies of the neighborhood, whom I managed to interest in him, took him under their protection. He is a pressman now at the Columbia Polytechnic Institute, and is doing well."

One of the remarkable blind women of Washington is Miss Laura Wilson, formerly a teacher in the public schools, who lost her sight several years ago. A year before her sight vanished her physicians told Miss Wilson that it was inevitable, and she then determined to employ her remaining months of enjoyment of the sense to the best possible advantage, and to lay up a store of treasures for the blindness that would be her portion during the remainder of her life.

So she did. Play after play of the great dramatists of all times she committed to memory, poem after poem, story upon story. She let the fading light of her eyes rest upon the masterpieces of art in painting and sculpture of every age and clime. She delved into the mysteries of science and philosophy. A retentive mind held all she gleaned.

Now Miss Wilson is a frequent speaker at the daily entertainments for the blind. She is a source of constant inspiration and encouragement, and she opens her storehouse of literary treasures for the free inspection of her friends. She has solved the secret of content and shares it generously.

Blind Girl Composer.

Another of the talented blind of the city is Miss Katie Grady, who is a graduate of the Maryland School for the Blind, and a young woman of many diversified accomplishments. She plays the piano with a broad insight into technique and with rare distinction; she has learned to use the typewriter without reference to the raised figures on the keys, the wonderful power of memory possessed by some of the sightless enabling her to dispense with this aid to accurate work; she uses a typesetting machine with equal skill; she is a broad-minded and progressive young woman, to whom her misfortune seems to lend only an additional distinction.

There are no mysteries for her in the several complicated systems of point alphabets which have been originated and changed to suit the varied needs of the blind. She reads practically all of them with equal ease.

A composer of promise is Miss Susie Duffy. She lacks, perhaps, something of the technical skill that marks Miss Grady, but possesses a broader insight in the beauties of music and art. The piano and the violin are her favorite instruments, her skill with the latter being only recently acquired. Her works have met with a very favorable reception and her future efforts give every indication that they will win for her a wider reputation.

Something of pathos there is in her story. So excellent is her talent, so sweeping the promise it seems to hold, it is a loss to art that it should not receive the most generous cultivation. The art soul of her needs to be delicately nurtured and expanded, her knowledge of the technique of her profession broadened, her vision of life spanned over a wider horizon. There are sordid reasons why, perhaps, this may not be.

Many Achieve Note.

In the colony of the blind at Washington there are many others who have achieved similar distinction or whose talents offer like promise. A charming and cultured gentleman and scholar is Prof. J. Francis Germuiller; a pianist of national standing Mr. Bischoff. Everyone knows the latter as the "blind pianist," and he has delighted multitudes in every section of the country. The few whose names are given serve merely as examples—as types—of the little colony that gathers in the pavilion at the Library almost every day.

The gatherings have been addressed by many of the most prominent men and women of the country, who have given their services generously and with a willing heart. They include authors and actors and painters, newspaper men, scientists, and scholars. The lectures and readings they give are not soft mental pabulum, but food, rather, for robust minds. These men and women, with sightless eyes, come eagerly to hear all that is said; they listen and understand and enjoy.

A story that aptly illustrates their outlook upon life relates to Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fiske and her recent productions of "Mary of Magdala" and "Hedda Gabler." Mrs. Fiske was a visitor at the pavilion for the blind at the Library and met Miss Giffin. Some broad catholicity of spirit, which both possess, brought them together, and they talked confidentially, Mrs. Fiske manifesting a deep interest in the blind and their pursuits. She was curious to know if they would like to attend one of her performances.

"They would be immensely pleased," was Miss Giffin's hearty response, "The fact that they cannot see makes their other senses much more acute, and they would enjoy the performance to the uttermost."

"I will send the tickets," said Mrs. Fiske, and she did. About a score of the blind, attended and conducted by Miss Giffin, witnessed the performances of both plays. The words of Hedda Gabler horrified them.

The Real Mrs. Fiske.

"I don't see why Miss Giffin should have wanted us to come and hear this woman," whispered one of the party to her companions. "She is dreadful; I hate her."

"Ah, but she is not the real Mrs. Fiske," the other responded, breathlessly. "You should hear her as Mary. Then she is very different. I am sure it must be very difficult for her to play a part like this."

Others of the prominent actors who have visited Washington have been similarly kind in the matter of tickets. Ellen Terry has been among the number, and Joseph Jefferson has enabled his blind friends to enjoy a frequent hour of unmixed fun and joy. Sir Henry Irving did not forget them. Indeed, for these great stars of the profession it has become a habit to visit the pavilion and in return to ask those for whose uses it is designed to accept the hospitality of their playhouses and enjoy the rare delights of their art.

The Columbia Polytechnic Institute offers large opportunities for the employment of the blind who have developed or can develop skill in the useful arts. It is a printing, binding, and publishing house of large importance, and yet few persons in Washington, and fewer still outside Washington, know even of its existence. Of these fewer still think of the work it is doing for humanity and the world.

About five years ago F. E. Cleaveland, then secretary of the State Board of Education for the blind of Connecticut, and president of the Connecticut Institution for the Blind, came to Washington in the interest of some proposed legislation for that institution. Mr. Cleaveland had himself been sightless for a score of years, and during that time had become thoroughly convinced that the hopeless condition of the adult blind in most cities of this country was due to causes outside of their affliction. For ten years he had been engaged in his native State in successfully demonstrating that fact.

Speaking of his visit to Washington and of the conditions that led to the establishment of the Columbia Polytechnic Institute, Mr. Cleaveland said:

"Five years ago fully two score blind

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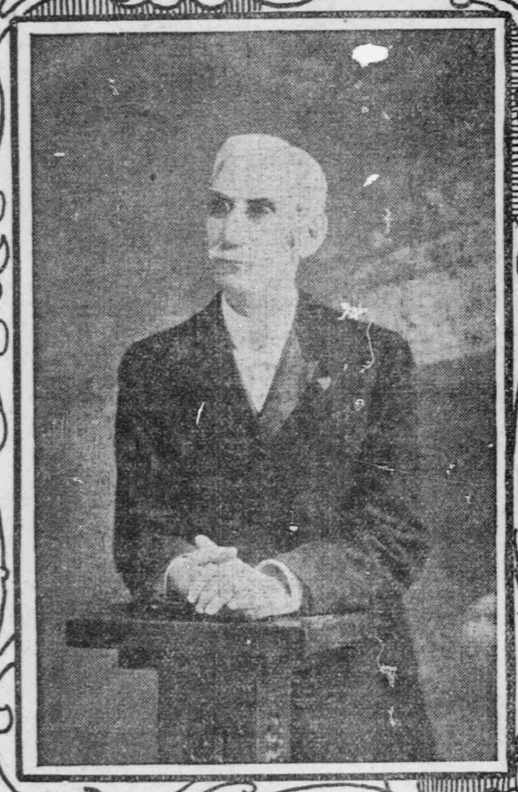
What the Ability to Read by Touch Means to These People.

What They Can Learn to Do Shown by Polytechnic Institute.

THE BLIND AT THEIR TASKS.
Writing with stylus and typewriters, reading and learning at the pavilion.

FRIEND OF UNFORTUNATE.
Miss Etta Jossellyn Giffin, Supt. of the pavilion.



WHERE REST AND QUIET REIGN.
The pavilion for the blind at the Congressional Library, with some of its constant visitors.

ELOQUENT BLIND CHAPLAIN.
Rev. H. N. Couden, D.D., who prays for House of Representatives.

BLIND LEADER OF BLIND.
F. E. Cleaveland, LL. B., who teaches the sightless to lead useful lives.

Twixt the Shadow and the Shining.

By HELEN MARR CAMPBELL, One of Washington's Gifted Blind.

There's an hour of tender dreaming
Twixt the shadow and the shining,
When bright Fancy hovers near us,
Scattering treasures from her urn,
And she paints a wondrous picture,
In the hearth-fire-light entwining
All the happy childhood mem'ries
With the thoughts that in us burn.
Now my tired hands are folded,
And my heart finds rest, beholding,
Thy fair image, gentle maiden,
In the embers' cheery glow,
Ah! what matter though deep sadness
Comes to me 'mid life's unfolding
Fancy brings back days beloved
In the golden long ago.

Now I hear thy rippling laughter,
As we cull the sweet wild flowers,
Now we talk of love's achieving,
As we wander through the glade,
E'en the tiny brooklet's singing
In those happy autumn hours,
Is, "rejoice in God's bright sunshine,
Look beyond, be not afraid."
So, sweet Fancy paints my picture,
Twixt the shadow and the shining;
And she weaves its frame of mem'ries,
Mid the fire-light's mellow glow;
And she soothes the heart's wild yearning,
All its care, its sad repining,
For, she brings back days beloved,
In the golden long ago.